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SUBJECT: The Reform Agenda - Energizing Youth and Public Support

¶1. Summary. The Ambassador and members of the Mission team used a late May visit to Eldoret and Kisumu to support grassroots youth organizations to press peacefully for implementation of the reform agenda, and to energize other public support for this. The three-day trip included inauguration of an inter-ethnic market reconstructed with U.S. support, discussions with community leaders, town hall meetings with youth, outreach through a call-in radio program, and installation as a Wanga Kingdom elder. The three-day visit was well-covered by the media. This message also includes reporting on a previous visit the Ambassador and Mission team made to Nakuru in Rift Valley also focused on outreach with respect to the reform agenda. End summary.

Eldoret in Rift Valley

¶2. The visit was the Ambassador's tenth to Rift Valley since the eruption of post-election violence last year. With Catholic Bishop Korir (who just won a lifetime human rights achievement award for his efforts to promote reconciliation), community leaders, and the constituency Member of Parliament Margaret Kamar, the Ambassador inaugurated the market at Burnt Forest, which was reconstructed by USAID following the violence last year. The market is used by Kalenjins and Kikuyus, and so plays both highly practical and symbolic roles. In his remarks the Ambassador emphasized the importance of reconciliation, and the relevance of implementation of the reform agenda to achieve that as well as to achieve economic growth. The Ambassador stopped at the Kiambaa church burial site to pay his respects to the 35 people burnt in that church during the post-election violence.

¶3. Following a meeting with community leaders, the Ambassador held a town hall meeting with a couple of hundred youth involved in grassroots non-political efforts to promote reconciliation and to push for implementation of reforms. The Ambassador emphasized the need for peaceful pressure across ethnic and political lines for implementation of the reform agenda. The town hall discussion was organized by the grassroots youth organizations Citizens Assembly and Rift Valley Dialogue. (Caroline Ruto, the head of Citizens Assembly, is a particularly dynamic leader and we have nominated her for the International Visitors Program.) The Ambassador invited MP Kamar to participate, and she held her own in the face of tough comments from the youth regarding the lack of progress on reforms. (Kamar is a member of PM Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement.)

Nakuru in Rift Valley

¶4. The visit to Eldoret followed another visit to Rift Valley in April, to Ndeffo-Molo near Nakuru, to participate in a peace event and town hall meeting organized by the grassroots youth organization Citizens Assembly (see above). The event opened with a peace and reconciliation ceremony and forum involving about 5,000 Kalenjins

and Kikuyus in a field between their respective living areas (the first time those communities had met together since the post-election violence). Religious leaders, community elders, local officials, war veterans, and others were involved - and the Administrative Police provided strong, positive support. The Ambassador addressed the gathering to urge redoubled efforts to promote reconciliation and to highlight the importance of implementation of reforms in order to achieve democratic stability. (The local Member of Parliament, who is not progressive and was linked to post-election violence, attempted to crash and take over the meeting, which the Ambassador refused to let happen.) The Ambassador then held a town hall meeting with about 100 youth leaders at Egerton University.

Kisumu in Nyanza Province

¶5. In Kisumu the Ambassador and his team met with progressive Mayor Sam Okello, and accompanied the Mayor on visits to a local hospital supported by the Centers for Disease Control, USAID, and PEPFAR. (CDC operates a large facility in Kisumu; the Ambassador held a town hall meeting there with the U.S. and local staff.) The Mayor and Ambassador also visited an association of self-employed youths and the public market, where an impromptu town hall meeting was held.

¶6. The Ambassador held discussions with an impressive group of community leaders (religious, private sector and other young professionals, elders, civil society, etc.) who have formed - with support through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives - the Nyanza Strategic Recovery Forum. The Forum's objective is to serve

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as a platform for people to support the economic and political recovery of Nyanza Province and the nation as a whole. The participants said that people feel a sense of hopelessness due to conflicting and unclear messages regarding the reform agenda that they hear from their leaders (President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga). The participants, though they operate on PM Odinga's home turf in Nyanza, said that they are increasingly seeing Odinga and their parliamentarians as part of the problem in Kenya, not as part of the solution. They are determined to press across ethnic and political lines to urge implementation of reforms.

¶7. The Ambassador held a town hall meeting with a group of 500 youth. The event was organized by the Nyanza Youth Coalition, a grassroots youth organization formed with assistance from the Office of Transition Initiatives. The Ambassador urged the youth to expand their efforts to press peacefully for implementation of the reform agenda, and to do so through coordinated efforts across ethnic and political lines. Importantly, Caroline Ruto of Citizens Assembly and the head of Kikuyus for Change (a similar grassroots youth organization based in Central Province) were present and participated in the town hall discussion. In addition to noting President Obama's current interest in supporting reform in Kenya, the Ambassador called attention to then Senator Obama's 2006 speech in Nairobi in which he specifically challenged youth to support reform. This was greeted with chants of "yes, we can." The two-hour discussion explored additional steps youth can undertake, particularly by expanding networking and coordinated action among youth groups. (We followed up on this. The Ambassador participated in a forum in late May near Nairobi which involved dozens of youth groups representing more than 28 of the 42 ethnic groups of Kenya. The forum resulted in an action plan to press for implementation of reforms.) Other issues discussed included the need for the youth groups to work to educate young people about political and economic issues, particularly with respect to the fact that economic development (and thus employment for the 50 percent of youth who are unemployed) is linked to political reform. The youth also noted that the political elite and other vested interests are putting pressure on emerging youth groups because they fear their independence and pressure for change.

Wanga Kingdom

18. The Ambassador used the occasion of his installation as a Wanga Kingdom elder to give a presentation that focused on the need for Kenya to harness its diversity to promote unity and economic and political progress. The Ambassador discussed the challenges the U.S. has faced in this regard, and noted that the considerable progress we have made demonstrates what can be achieved. (The Wanga Kingdom is located in Mumias in Western Province and dates back many centuries. With the assistance of the huge Mumias Sugar Company based there, the Wanga are preserving their rich heritage in an impressive cultural center.)

19. These trips are part of continuing public and private diplomacy outreach efforts to energize support for implementation of the reform agenda, and to promote ongoing reconciliation efforts.
RANNEBERGER